Impostor

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A Poetry Journal

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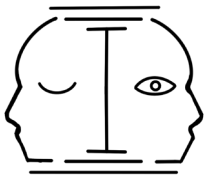

Impostor: A Poetry Journal
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Impostor syndrome: the belief that talents and accomplishments are fraudulent or the result of luck.

Editors
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Logo by Paulina Sucre

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Cover: Vincent van Gogh (b. Zundert, Netherlands, 1853–d. Auvers-sur-Oise, France, 1890), *The Potato Eaters*, detail, 1885. Oil on canvas, 32.3 in × 44.9 in. Collection of Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands. Public domain.

From the Editors

Welcome to the spring/summer issue of *Impostor*!

This issue exclusively features the work of poets who, at the time of submission, had no more than three publications to their name. We chose this theme as a return to our roots as a journal, borne out of a desire to share the work of emerging voices. The literary world and its goalposts are forever changing, but one thing remains the same: poetry should not be a space for the privileged and few.

The cover art for this issue is a detail from Vincent van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* (1885) which he considered one of his best works despite its stark difference from the vibrant, colorful Post-Impressionist style he's known for. We chose this art because Vincent's roundabout journey is relatable—his chosen profession changed multiple times over a decade before he finally settled on becoming an artist.

In one of his many letters to his brother, Theo, he wrote: ". . . perhaps someday you will see that I too am an artist. . . . I don't know what I can do, but I hope I shall be able to make some drawings with something human in them. . . . The path is narrow, the door is narrow, and there are few who find it."* We can't say for certain if Vincent suffered from what we'd now refer to as impostor syndrome, but this is one interpretation of his words.

As always, we hope you enjoy these stunning poems as much as we did, and join us in celebrating these emerging talents.

Sincerely,
L.M. and Coral

Our Mission

Impostor syndrome: the belief that talents and accomplishments are fraudulent or the result of luck.

Perhaps you've experienced it yourself—we certainly have! When we created this journal, we knew that first and foremost, we wanted to foster a welcoming and encouraging space for poets, who—like ourselves—may feel intimidated by the established literary world, or that their credentials (or lack thereof) aren't "good enough." Publication history and academic background hold no influence over our view of what constitutes a poet. Your voice matters and we want to hear it!

*To learn more about this transformative period in Vincent's career, please read Nellie Hermann's piece "Idle Bird" in *The Paris Review*.

Table of Contents

Mallory McDonald
Scientists Have Confirmed that Humans Have No Free Will 9

Lane Wattle
My Friend Asks Me to Write Her Dating Profile 10

Livia Daggett
Ode to Student Neighborhoods 11

Stefanie Lee
ON KNOWING HOW TO ACHE 12

Elysha Snider
an exterior monologue 13

Benjamin Jones
Ode to My Ex. 14

Ossian Houltzén
I, Saxifraga 15

T
In His Hands 16

Dakota Smith
Just Don't Call Me Up 17

Elizabeth Rhodes
The Traveler 18

Heather Phelan
My Mother's Apples 19

Corey Stano
Pride 20

Nupur Azadi
Leisure Manifesto 21

Emily Bennett
Poolside 22

Catarina Delgado
Spiral 23

James Milanesi
DUCK RIDES 24

Mari Lee Rose
Between Not Yet 25

Andrea Benson
On Longing, 26

Charlotte Morgan
Salvation 27

Emily Johnson
It's All Wet Confetti 29

Sam Miller
The Angel's Share 30

HOLLOW FLESH
YELLOW BOX 31

Sierra Sonberg
Friendship Bracelets 32

Ella Wisniewski
Ars Poetica 34

Scientists Have Confirmed that Humans Have No Free Will

Mallory McDonald

In every universe,
you never get the card
I drafted at the kitchen table
full of best wishes
and a hint of confession.

I had hoped
it would be received
in the heartsick spirit
it was written,
and that it would turn
this goodbye bittersweet

until *girlfriend* left your lips
and I, shellshocked,
did not catch your eye
as I left for the last time.

In every universe,
I stand over the trash can
and feel cardstock fold
under my fingers,
ripping your name
from heart and envelope
until it is illegible.

consider this an act
of determinism,
and let fate tear us apart.

My Friend Asks Me to Write Her Dating Profile

Lane Wattle

I haven't even written a budget
to know if I could afford a mortgage, alone.
Eighteen years with a man, guarded
since I left my childhood home,
though she says I'm right for this
because you know me so well.
She slumps onto the couch, swiping
photos with nothing-to-watch-on-Netflix energy.
Women who cradle dead fish,
hair styled by the same barber.
Where do all the femmes go after pride?
she asks. I unfurl my flow of curls
from their tie, tourniquet the band
around my fingers until they turn
valentine red. The distraction of her eyes
on me as I tap my curiosity for someone
else to enjoy. My thirst unquenched
despite a tidal wave of glasses.
She's ticking the boxes, narrowing in
on the woman she's seeking
My fit colleague is twelve years younger.
Is that too young? she asks.
I blush on doing the maths
No. Of course not.

Ode to Student Neighborhoods

Livia Daggett

Candy wrappers litter
the only strip of grass
on the block.
Cans kick and skip underfoot,
dumpsters spill over
the top, plastic bags float and
the furniture boxes, my God,
the furniture boxes—
every year a new mattress frame,
a distorted mirror,
a particle board bedside table,
a wobbly Target TV stand, every year
new bodies in the same rooms,
and the boxes never end.

I'm too fragile for this place,
for beeping dump trucks at 4 a.m.,
for drunk staggerings past my door,
for anonymous neighbors and for
jumping when a child's laugh
breaks the collegiate monotony.

I thought that an address,
an apartment number, a rug,
an electric kettle, a $50 bookshelf,
could make this cold city mine.
I want so badly a home to call my own.
But I am ever unsettled,
ever in flux,
left to rot on the curb and
cleared away just in time
for next year's tenant.

ON KNOWING HOW TO ACHE

Stefanie Lee

immortality is the language we could never learn to speak.
I toss laughter over my shoulder even as it turns into wind—

like a bridal bouquet—aware of the potential fallouts.
these ricocheting darts of headaches will cease & die.

at the intersection of joy & pleasure is a woman who doesn't
know how to sigh. she points at the heart drumming beneath

my heaving chest & asks if it still beats when the day
slips incoherently into tomorrow. as always, I remain

unsure of what to do with the circus of my hands—do I slap
away the irritation? do I translate their unintelligible groans,

fist over fist as I build myself inwards during times of
big changes? I litter a path with failure's breadcrumbs,

proof of safe passage through this life. still, this woman who
chokes on her sighs cannot save herself from everyday grief.

any smattering of unwelcome rain will be her undoing,
& meanwhile I release my despair into patient exhales.

waiting for what is not pleasure but joy, seeping through scars,
by aching alongside it. I will not chase it like heaven ensnares,

cage with birds—fearful & without a choice—instead,
temporary breaths will teach an open heart new songs.

an exterior monologue

Elysha Snider

i wear skin like holes in jeans
an intentional look, an accidental tear
permanent ink and tie-dye flesh
(un)timeless like a t-shirt
losing its color in the wash
i heard we were made of stardust
but all i see are freckles
grandma's touch times the sun's kiss
like tiny scabs that never heal
i'm more like an anachronistic sac
sprinkled with melanin stars
but what about the critters?
the crow's feet that frame my eyes or
the crocodile who sleeps in my heart or
the slug cells that crawl along my insides?
i've never thought of myself as a habitat
but if i am a habitat
why do i house an anthropocentric brain and
harbor my raging feelings and
fade like a t-shirt in an (un)timed spin cycle?
why do my lovers moonlight as cartographers
who can map my scars and
tell me about my late grandma and
see the remnants of the beach day when
i forgot my sunscreen?
so if i let you read my body-
of-work
you'll see i'm most like a ghost story
(un)spectral and
written in cursive
looping from the sky
to the ground
and back
again

Ode to My Ex.

Benjamin Jones

I have made terms:
ravaged, silk, bread of muscle,
your iron chest bare for my weeping
& you ever wanting more of me
till there was none and I renounced you.
Perhaps we could have soldiered on:
us in swanky cafes, nights holding hands,
the pit of your arms in smothered sheets to wake
to the self-same morning begging appreciation
by our pairing. But why did I run? Young,
barely breaking adulthood, I wanted more
than skin & silk and your iron chest:
I wanted a man who would withstand the
tumults of my mind, be rock bare as a
herald of good tidings, be more than the
paper-thin flesh that aches with a quick
resolution. I wanted man in the long
run. You wanted me for the
ephemeral that may only quake to
suddenly die out. So, I have had to leave,
go to better things & search
the never-ending field of a man
who loves in all parts equally. But I
will tally you. I will remember: flesh,
pink, seeds—all sorts of odd things—
wild and untamed whilst
I barely made a year past twenty.

I, Saxifraga

Ossian Houltzén

I am a maroon icicle,
an emotional ellipsis

You, ruby &
I, Saxifraga

& your lifeblood makes a
—sorry,
washy wine

In His Hands

T

perhaps the ants also
worship God
in their colonies

growing in numbers along
the same dirt
we come from

they must love the
ability to exist
in God's hands

tracing his palm print
while searching for
the root of his Earth

the closest
I ever got to our father
was when I left his house.

naked in knowledge,
(what little I had)
another one searching

though I haven't returned
I still feel the heat of his
ridged fingers around my wrist

a reminder that he is
within and without
everywhere and always.

Just Don't Call Me Up

Dakota Smith

Beautiful fragile Bambi take my hand
as we enter the void or McSorley's
Couldn't go till the '70s but now it's all good
I eat saltines in peace I'm all pep lick it up

You're so into me I birthed you Kitten
You know my organs like the B-sides
of a rare collection you are the needle
of my record player I can't stand replacing you

Pumpkin Pie how alarming you aren't
Apple Dear mix me instant mash
by the light of your hot plate
destroy my bed frame like it's nothing

My Little Tuna Fish don't knock just come in
I've been waiting for someone I can call up anytime
My Raw Sugar you're there with the schmear
like you're there on my couch for three months
a margarita on the rocks all salt

Let's make this thing official
I'm taken by my Cupcake Sprinkle
Catch me like a fastpitch a salmon
cook me with rosemary and lemon
Throw me back you pescatarian

Better yet row my boat anywhere else
My Baklava let's backtrack all my best days
spent on you Knucklehead Break my bread
and butter I've never been surer you're not the one

Sweet Wasabi you are ruining my life
I'm disinviting you to the bbq so you can't
double dip my whole thigh deep fry my feelings
eat me out of house and home just don't call me up

The Traveler

Elizabeth Rhodes

She'd cook *kare-kare*,
Cut vegetables, slice pork.

Chinese cabbage and asparagus,
She'd sit on a plane like a pot

Ready to boil over next
To the picture of the man.

He'd once flown over to her land
Either to love or just eat *lumpia*.

On the grass of America
Stripes of freedom under,

A dish of either fire or frozen food,
She'd cook like her mother taught her.

Light the stove, place the pan,
Look at the picture of that man

Who took you across the world
But no longer loves you.

My Mother's Apples

Heather Phelan

When I was six years old and hungry,
I asked my mother why she bought
The worst apples in the store. She said,
Because they were the cheapest.

Maybe she just wanted to know
She was a mother who bought fruit,
That if she couldn't keep the doctor away
It was on me—she couldn't force an apple a day.

I decided I hated apples.
The fruit bowl would hold them
Until tiny flies gathered near the stem,
Making our kitchen a decaying still life.

I didn't realize until I was 22,
And the Pink Ladies at the market
Looked so crisp, like they'd been plucked
From a tree in a Renaissance painting,
That apples can taste
Like childhoods I never had,
If I buy them just because I want them.

Pride

Corey Stano

My Pride is not—
a parade sponsored by Raytheon
a cop clad in tasers and rainbows
a $20 tee shirt sold by Target
My Pride is—
a safe space in a queer bookshop
a defiant drag queen on a weekday in Florida
a free condom from The Center
It is—
thrown bricks and
bricks for a Pulse memorial and
DIY HRT and
HRT paid for by the state and
queer subtext and
queer text taught in schools and
It is—
Every single cruel word
from a politician or priest
turned into a badge of honor
that we wear with
Pride

Leisure Manifesto

Nupur Azadi

Leisure is forgetfulness.
To forget what time it is,
where you were meant to be,
and where—now—you find yourself.
Leisure is forgetting what's for dinner,
how to cook, who is waiting,
where you left the keys,
how to get home from here.

Leisure is not knowing,
better yet not caring,
how many eyes you have on you
at any given precious,
little moment of every unremarkable day.

Leisure is kindness,
given and returned—
without distrust, without expectations.
Leisure is a stroll, a swim, a walk;
a smoke, a swig, a fuck.
Leisure is a limbo, lethargically lounging
in a temporal bliss, seeped in innocence,
in waywardness, in hysteria, in unpredictability
of a life that will never—never—repeat itself.

Leisure is elective,
yet urgent. And,
more than anything,
more than ever,
leisure is a feminist issue.

Poolside

Emily Bennett

The extra stitches I'd added
to the neckline of my swimsuit are pulled
taut—the wrong shade of pink.

I tuck and retuck my tampon string,
wishing again for a little more stretch
to cover what is now my fault.

Last year they were just my legs.
Now they are a gateway drug for men:
friends, coaches, classmates,

and brothers. Yes brothers,
the reasons I wasn't allowed to leave
the bathroom in a towel after a shower.

The hot cement under my feet reminds me
I'm allowed to wear a towel here. Still,
I decline every invitation to jump in,

sideline my pornographic girlhood.
Baring my cap-sleeved tan lines, I dangle
pink-painted toes in the water,

while my brothers'
bare chests
brown in the sun.

Spiral

Catarina Delgado

Guilt is the sun that touches your skin when you convince yourself nothing is enough. Listen. No one is immune to the boredom of modernity or internet discussions that lead nowhere, but I can't complain. I also entertain my brain with everything that makes me feel a little more human, a quest for goosebumps that often backfires, but we love to feel the fire. You are the insect peering into a starving chasm, obsessing over what lies at the bottom and terrified of the infinite darkness above. A question infiltrates the search for comfort in the misguided kindness of an ocean that chooses not to drown us. When you can't find answers, you learn to understand your anger. We want to devour, but nothing satiates us.

DUCK RIDES

James Milanesi

A PLASTIC BAG SCURRIES
LIKE A RAT YOU SAY
WITH YOUR ARM BANDAGED AROUND MINE
LEAVES CRUNCH LOUDLY IN THE STILL
I LIKE THE WINTER BECAUSE IT'S QUIETER
I SAY WITH SOME TRUTH
WE PASS A FOOD HALL
BUILT LIKE A MUSEUM
INSPIRED BY A PARKING GARAGE
YOU TELL ME THERE WAS A HORRIBLE ACCIDENT
DURING THE DUCK RIDES
EVERYONE DIED
THE COBBLESTONES ALL TILT TOGETHER
LEANING TOWARDS THE END OF THE WORLD
I RUN THERE AND LOOK DOWN
IN THE SWIRLING MASS OF DEAD TREES
ALL HOLDING HANDS
A GOLD POCKET WATCH THE SIZE OF MY HAND
RESTS IN A VELVET CHAIR
WE WATCH THROUGH THE GLASS
TO SEE IF IT'S MOVING
ITS TINY HANDS FOLD
AT ITS SIDES YET
WE WATCH LIKE IT WAS ON TELEVISION
WE PASSED A CRANE FROZEN IN PLACE
HALF PIERCING THE GROUND
AND IT FELT LIKE
WE WERE ALL ON TELEVISION

Between Not Yet

Mari Lee Rose

In the space between measures ||| ***Filling the chasm [ ]*** In between thin dashed lines – – – **Tracing the gap – –** *In between hyper and ventilation /]* A void ***not*** *yet* ***emptied*** */-|]**

****/Cold inertia spilling out of me over everything 'cause I am here not yet there like a stain of dark ink my tainted blood paints it all I am done not yet begun*** like this storm I insisted to hold still but somehow just started paralyzing me 'cause maybe it can't be any other way. Not just yet.***]***

On Longing,

Andrea Benson

It started in the morning, slow and warm as the daylight
leaking through the curtains until my bed was soaked in it.
I wanted to hold it close to me and pretend that
pretending was enough, at least for the moment.
It followed me through the day. I saw it in reflections
on shop windows, in mirrors, on surfaces that had no reflections at all.
When I walked a certain way and cast twin shadows
under the streetlamp, I saw it there,
printed on the sidewalk. It was everywhere I looked.
I heard it once, when a man said my name.
I listened hard, trying to hear it again, but never did.
I became acutely aware of my heart inside my chest—
each distinct beat wanting to be felt separately.
I always felt it; don't think I didn't.

This is all to say, love, I have been missing you dearly.

Salvation

Charlotte Morgan

Did we take the train or drive? I don't remember. It doesn't matter.
That weekend, I remember the Peaks were grey and green and
the people didn't really know me.

On the church weekend away,
beneath the veneer of innocence and respectable fun,
a much darker reality was set to claim me.

I already knew I was an impostor
with my heathen boyfriend waiting for me at home.

He devoured me
and I let him.
Our desire was supposed to be shameful
and yet nothing felt more holy
than his hands on me.

Hands
lifted in prayer.
Songs that strike a chord,
piercing open my heart,
words flooding in and
twisting me into knots,
parting me from my soul.

I got stuck
somewhere between the old ways and the new
and I lost it:

I told him, let me have your mind, give your body to others,
as if those lips on mine were not righteous,
as if our bodies intertwined
was not a sacred thing.

Terror gripped me as I waited
for almighty judgment to rain down,
but that crack of thunder never came.

The terror passed,
and soon
I was undressed in his bed again.

There, I found my salvation.

It’s All Wet Confetti

Emily Johnson

It’s an ache, this living
and when we love,
it’s all wet confetti
painting concrete.

The Angel's Share

Sam Miller

Traveling still in my book
I learn of scotch
and the language of its making.
Pot still, peat kiln,
malt, grist, wort and wash—
the distillation into low wines—
and how
aging chestnut in quiet oaken barrels
scotch breathes out water, esters
ephemeral alcohol
la part des anges
the angel's share.

Though solely earthbound
I recognize the concept.
Anyone fluent in
the language of motels,
that baser French
knows it's about
being happy to accept
getting buzzed on less than the whole drink
then waking up alone,
and thirsty.

YELLOW BOX

HOLLOW FLESH

PRAYERS FOR PERFECTION
FROM THE YELLOW BOX
YOU CALL HOME
FOR THE FIRST TIME
NO ONE IS THERE
FACING THE JUNGLE
YOU SLEPT IN
YOU SCRAWL TIRED POEMS
IN FADING PALENESS
AS THE DAY ENDS

Friendship Bracelets

Sierra Sonberg

I was never a kid who made friendship bracelets
or hugged my friends
or made pacts saying we would be together forever

I just assumed
that
it was implied

through the hours of giggling
        crying
        venting
in unfinished basements and cozy attics
on snow days and birthdays and holidays

I was never a kid who acted stupid in front of a crush
or wrote them *do you like me* letters
or had a crush at all

I just assumed
that
my friends felt the same

that the romances in books were made up
        rose-tinted fantasies
        too good to be true
until the late-night conversations turned to stolen glances
and he loves me he loves me not he

love
is not a word I am used to
too small—for him
too big—for me

in their hands
underneath bare wrists

relationship trumps friendship
every time

I thought my quiet love was enough
without something tangible to tie it down
but now I wish

I was a kid who made friendship bracelets.

Ars Poetica

Ella Wisniewski

Do you remember the weekend I visited you in Madrid?
We nursed our old hurt into jokes, into art, ate pickles in bed
because you didn't have a table. We clinked *tinto de verano*

and discovered that love is not something to be wrangled. We held
hands in the back of the airport taxi, how we used to when
we were girls, praying in the chapel before school. You helped me

unload my suitcase and I remembered how your eyes used to look
in the stained-glass gleam of a cold Wednesday morning. I don't know
why I stopped writing you letters. I did not intend to let you

slip from me, to let our lives meander and never cross.
But I will always have you to thank for waking this *thing*,
this hungry poet inside me, who learned to borrow words

and bend them to her liking. Too many years later, I am far away,
stitching what I know of us into folklore, flirting with the urge
to disappear into a tangle of epithets, you know, to hide

behind my language rather than let it lead me to you.
I don't mean to worry you. I can still picture the shallow curve
of river we grew our limbs in. I know who we are to each other.

From the day we met, you have stained me plump with olive oil,
and to miss you is to pull apart the heavy folds of a gray curtain.
I rest on wrecks of our expired time, crumbling in my palms,

building like high towers of wet sand until I see you again.
Homer had no word for blue and so the sea was wine dark.
This is what I mean when I call you my friend.

Contributors

Nupur Azadi is an international stage artist and writer. She is the creator of the art form Theatrical Poetry. Through her work, she explores the unbounded personal liberties as the ultimate beckoning of any social movement.

Emily Bennett is a poet based in Hannover, Germany. She is a mother of two children, English teacher, lover of women's sports, and writer of poetry by night. Many of her writings can be found on Instagram @afterthoughts.poetry.

Andrea Benson is a poet and performer based in Phoenix, Arizona. She graduated from Sarah Lawrence College's Masters of Fine Arts in writing program in 2019. Her writing is inspired by poets like Martha Rhodes, Matthea Harvey, Ilya Kaminsky, Marie Howe, Ron Villanueva, Kim Addonizio, and more.

Livia Daggett is a copy editor by night and a junior at the University of Pittsburgh studying writing and philosophy. This is her first publication. She loves to read, knit, and provide overbearing care to her houseplants.

Catarina Delgado is a writer from Setúbal, Portugal. She has poems published in the Portuguese literary magazine *Eufeme* and a short story in the art and literary magazine *Pigeon Review*. She self-published her first Portuguese poetry collection *Fragmentos*.

HOLLOW FLESH is a poetry and electronic noise project. The sole artist uses a stream-of-consciousness method to create short bursts of visceral imagery and textures.

Ossian Houltzén (he/him) is a Swedish-Turkish student currently living in Sweden.

Emily Johnson is a high school special education teacher from Massachusetts. She has been published in *Monkeybicycle*.

Benjamin Jones is a gay ESL teacher based in Las Vegas, Nevada, currently getting an MA in poetry.

Stefanie Lee is an ambitious young writer from Montréal, Canada. Living with a rare physical disability called Nemaline Myopathy, she will be studying software engineering as of fall 2024. When she is not writing or studying, she can be found editing her photography or solving crossword puzzles.

Mari Lee Rose is from beautiful San Juan, Puerto Rico. Her writing explores her mental health symptoms and superpowers. She has a BA in communication from the University of Puerto Rico. She started writing poetry as a child and adopted a more experimental style during her Saturn Return.

Mallory McDonald is an emerging writer and Master's student from Alabama.

James Milanesi was born and raised in the Philadelphia area. Born straight out of the womb in already worn-in Doc Martens and bad tattoos. He is an interdisciplinary poet and bartender. Mostly bartender since the poet thing doesn't pay very well. He has previously written a chapbook titled *Momentary Sweetheart* (Bottlecap Press). He is the curator and founder of a collective of poets who call themselves Poet's Row.

Sam Miller is a writer and bookstore manager from Louisville, Kentucky. She graduated with an English degree from the University of Louisville where she studied with former Kentucky Poet Laureate Maureen Morehead. She has also workshopped at the Mann-Naslund School of Writing at Spalding University.

Charlotte Morgan is a public engagement professional by day and poet by night, living in London with her husband and three-year-old daughter. She writes about childhood, motherhood, relationships, and mental health. You can find her on Instagram @notanothrmillennial.

Heather Phelan is a mental health nurse based in London, UK. She has a degree in English with creative writing and uses her experiences in mental health to write poetry rooted in emotion, self-exploration, and personal growth.

Elizabeth Rhodes is a graduate of California Baptist University with a degree in creative writing. She's been published in the CBU journal, *The*

Dazed Starling, with works such as “Inside Rain.” She loves to write stories that are raw but hopeful. She also enjoys spending time in nature and with her cat.

Dakota Smith (she/her) is a poet, performance artist, and writer who received her MFA from Randolph College. Her work can be found in *The Rumpus*, *Good River Review*, and *The Westchester Review*. She lives in New York City.

Elysha Snider is an educator, mother, and writer. She has an MA in English from the University of Calgary, and her work has appeared in *Canadian Literature* journal, *filling Station* magazine, and *Poetry Pause*. Originally from San Pedro, California, she currently lives in Alberta with her family.

Sierra Sonberg is an aro-ace author and artist studying animation at Ringling College of Art and Design. She adores storytelling and hopes her stories can have a positive impact on the world around her. When she’s not writing, she can be found reading, drawing, or doing logic puzzles.

Corey Stano is a queer writer and artist living on Florida’s Space Coast. They are also the voice and poet of the eclectic spoken word/prog music duo Stanislav and the Lion. Find more of their work on Instagram @coreypoetry.

T is a black poet in the American South. They are currently pursuing a Master’s in English with a concentration in creative writing. Poetry is their focus for their Master’s project, where they are exploring black queer faith or lack thereof.

Lane Wattle is an emerging queer poet, painter, hiker, and preschool teacher from Australia. Lane has a late-night writing routine as the community of birds who share her home insist on using the keyboard during the day. Connect with Lane on Instagram @lanewattle.

Ella Wisniewski (she/her) is a poet from Delaware and an MFA candidate at West Virginia University. You can find her work in *HAD*, *Bruiser*, *Free the Verse*, and elsewhere.

Editors

L.M. Camiolo (she/her) lives and writes in Philadelphia and enjoys horror, hauntology, and antiquing for oddities. Her work has most recently appeared in *ANARKISS*, *Buffalo Journal*, *Genrepunk*, and *Troublemaker Firestarter*. Find more at beacons.ai/lmcamiolo.

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